

# Inter Esse

## Working in-between institutions

Per Zetterfalk

I am the first doctoral student to graduate from the University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre – Dramatiska Institutet, in Stockholm. My subject is artistic formation and interpretation, and indirectly, scientific interpretations. I have followed Lars Norén's production of a new play for the theater, *Kyla* [Chill], and the Swedish national television's production of a new format, in a (according to the company) new genre, the reality drama *Riket* [The Kingdom]. These two examples constitute opposite poles in the field "art and entertainment". In addition, I have played a double role as a researcher and a filmmaker. My work has resulted in a dissertation, *Inter esse. Det skapande subjektet, Norén och Reality* (published by Gidlunds) [Inter Esse: The Creative Subject, Norén and Reality] and a documentary film, *Norén's drama* (distributed by Folkets bio).

As things stand today, it is impossible to obtain a doctoral degree at the art colleges in Stockholm, so my dissertation was officially in the field of film studies. This work was made possible by the research school *Aesthetic Learning Processes*, which was financed by the Swedish Research Council and was a new cooperative effort among eight universities, colleges, and institutes, half of which were within the field of art. I had one scholarly and one artistic advisor: Sven-Eric Liedman, professor of the history of ideas and learning, and Suzanne Osten, professor of theatrical directing.

It is one thing to plan to do a research project on the border between art and science; to actually function in this field is something else. Much is written about collaborations within and between institutional structures, but what does it mean, in practice, to be in the field of tension "in-between"? My aim to make a film as a doctoral candidate was unexpected, both within the research school and Dramatiska Institutet. The result, *Inter esse* and *Norén's Drama*, has

challenged traditional boundaries and the institutes: their way of looking at things, their narratives, and their roles.

## To be on the border

In our times, there is a great deal of interest in work that crosses boundaries – both in order to draw boundaries and to dissolve them. There may be a longing for a meeting between art and science “in research and the attempts to solve humanity’s eternal existential questions,” as music scholar Henrik Karlsson writes in an early report of the field, but he also states that it is hard for representatives of art and science to speak the same language.<sup>1</sup> He noted that it was difficult for scholars to shift their positions. I have also observed the same difficulty in carrying on a dialogue among those who represent the artistic field.

During my time as a doctoral candidate, the area of art and research was undergoing a rapid transformation. There has been both enthusiasm for and skepticism about the new ideas. For example, Per Lysander, director of Dramatiska Institutet, writes the following about the closeness in subject between theatre training and theatre research:

*“Paradoxically enough, such collaborations have been rare and seems to be difficult both to establish and to uphold. The apparent closeness seems rather to strengthen the need for boundaries.”<sup>2</sup>*

A few years later, he writes about his view of the emergence of the new field:

*“It is probably also true that proximity in the area of interest paradoxically discharges the questions at issue.”<sup>3</sup>*

On the surface, it is about the search for truth and about formalities. To make a gross generalisation, science is afraid of a watered-down reflection, while art is afraid of limiting reflection through rules, procedures and conformity. Advocates for art also fear that its forms of expression will be diluted. Concerning the difference in questions between traditional research and art, Per Lysander writes:

*There are a number of traditional humanistic disciplines that have claimed, to varying degrees, to turn artistic praxis into science: literary studies, art studies, film studies, etc. These subjects and fields of knowledge have developed within scientific paradigms. They have often been based on a mixture of applying simple sociological methods and significant theoretical and conceptual sophistication. These attributes have had a legitimizing function within the scientific community, while at the same time the working artist often has found them banal or irrelevant.<sup>4</sup>*

In reply to this, it could be argued that practice cannot be separated from theory. At an art college like Dramatiska Institutet – and at other advanced-level artistic training institutes – people do not always see their own paradigms. The theories that are actually used are not always conscious. The reason might be the often prevalent notion that by becoming conscious of the artistic process, one risks destroying it. But it need not be so.<sup>5</sup> There are also people who both

1. Henrik Karlsson, “Handslag, famntag, klapp eller kyss?” *Konstnärlig forskarutbildning i Sverige* (Stockholm 2002), p. 35.
2. See Per Lysander, “Kunskapen i konsten”, in Torbjörn Lind and Jesper Wadensjö, eds., *Konst Kunskap Insikt. Texter om forskning och utvecklingsarbete på det konstnärliga området* (Stockholm 2004), pp. 64-73. Cit. p. 71.
3. See Per Lysander and Ingela Josefson, “Förord”, in Sten Dahlstedt et al, the anthology *Berättelse och kunskap. Texter om forskning och utvecklingsarbete på det konstnärliga området* (Stockholm 2006), pp. 6-18. Cit. p. 11.
4. Ibid, p. 8.
5. The psychoanalyst Johan Cullberg writes about the fear of inspection: “It is a not uncommon belief among artists that anguish is a prerequisite for creativity. Perhaps this builds on the faulty belief that suffering can pave the way for creative work. I have not been able to observe that suffering in itself has any such effect, rather the opposite.” See Johan Cullberg, *Skaparkriser. Strindbergs Inferno och Dagermans* (1992, Stockholm 1997), p. 180.

want to and can do both.

The questions posed by the new field, I argue, are to a great extent about *how* to pose and answer questions. The same is true for newborns as for artists and researchers: Everyone wants to see order in chaos, and patterns – to understand – and both artists and researchers want something new to develop from the process.

## Self-images

Institutions are systems of people. On a deeper level – and this is important – the positionings are about power.<sup>6</sup> My own work involved a collaboration between Dramatiska Institutet and the film department at the Stockholm University, which was not a self-evident approach. The purpose of creating the Cinema centre in Stockholm, Filmhuset, was, once upon a time, to capture the tensions between the film industry, a film school, and a film research centre under one roof. One floor apart, Dramatiska Institutet and the department for film studies largely succeeded in remaining separate from each other for three decades. An initiative for collaboration such as mine in 2003 seems not to have been part of the usual order of business. One year later, Dramatiska Institutet left Filmhuset in order to move into its own building just meters away, and so did I.

At Dramatiska Institutet, scientific knowledge and written reflection have been a limited part of the education, while film studies has never had a solid knowledge about the artistic work process itself. Possibly this contributed to the fact that during my work with an artistic interpretation and analysis of artistic creation, there existed a skepticism between the two institutes, in both directions.

On the one hand, the people involved wanted to protect the core of their subjects (ideals and legitimacy), on the other, it is a matter of self-images (status, shortcomings and notions about “the Other”). This has clearly contributed to the dialogue between the two.

In the encounter with research, art schools have problems with their own identities, since they assume that their students, teachers, and trainings are unique. Per Lysander writes the following about the training at Dramatiska Institutet:

*Every path toward artistic expressions leads inevitably inward, toward one's self. Therefore Dramatiska Institutet actually cannot educate anyone to be anything other than him- or herself. To undergo the training should entail being one's self, hopefully to a greater and greater degree.<sup>7</sup>*

The art historian Howard Singerman has a different opinion. He argues that artistic education is largely focused on creating the professional subject. To actively formulate the role – what one does and should do as an artist – is one of the most important goals of the college.<sup>8</sup>

One problem is that the established boundaries between institutions are based on old and perhaps outdated concepts, which can hinder progress. Henrik Karlsson writes:

*The fact that artistic research is unique and not like anything else*

6. One aspect of all search for knowledge, especially prominent at the introduction of new fields, is the economic one. Per-Anders Forstorp and Jörgen Nissen describe the allocation of resources within academia as “a battlefield and a marketplace where the capacity for dramatic creation can be crucial.” See Per-Anders Forstorp and Jörgen Nissen, “TEMA: Gränsdragningar och gränsöverskridanden i Högskolevärlden”, in Ylva Boman and Tomas Englund, eds., *Utbildning & Demokrati: Tidskrift för didaktik och utbildningspolitik*, vol. 15, nr. 2 (Örebro 2006), pp. 7-24. Cit. p. 22. Peter Cornell, at the time art theoretician at Kungliga Konsthögskolan, writes that at many colleges, the desire for research resources has been at the expense of a freer thinking around those possibilities that the new research area involves. See Peter Cornell, “Reflektioner kring en konstnärlig forskarutbildning,” in Marianne Hultman, ed., *Hjärnstorm. Konst och forskning*, nrs. 76 & 77 (Stockholm 2002), pp. 37-38.
7. Per Lysander, “Dl:s identitet är dess identiteter,” [www.draminst.se](http://www.draminst.se) (2002-02-02).
8. Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects. Making Artists in the American University* (Los Angeles 1999). Cf. art scholar Anna Brodow, who writes: “We have been able to see a clearer professionalization of the artist where the professional role itself - being an artist - has become a complicated role that requires training [...] because art no longer has a given identity and the crossing of boundaries between different roles in artistic life have become more frequent.” See Anna Brodow, “Från konstnärligt utvecklingsarbete till konstnärlig forskning,” in Hultman (2002), pp. 7-13. Cit. p. 9.

*appears in this context as a negative effect of an inherited role play.”<sup>9</sup>*

It makes collaboration between art schools and closely related academic subjects more difficult.

## The outside perspective

In the research school that I belonged to, and which, on paper, was about approaching “the interface between art and research,” my approach was met with strong resistance from the administrative coordinator, who was a pedagogue and had limited artistic experience. I insisted on creating and he, like others in the new field, got stuck in metaperspectives about what is what and why. Since he was initially also my advisor, I was not allowed to begin my artistic project, and things were about to go very badly.

The social game is an important aspect of all research and art. There is always a bigger risk for those who try to do something new, regardless of the discipline. One should not be able to stop others’ ambitions without having a good argument; yet it happens. This is a real side of all development.

In the spring of 2007, Suzanne Osten and I wrote a dialogue text about our experiences of the conditions of the research field for an anthology about aesthetic learning processes. It was to be published by the research school that we had been a part of. However, our critical reflections were not to the taste of the editor. Therefore I and – for the first time in her life – Osten were turned down. In protest against the censorship, Sven-Eric Liedman retracted his contribution from the anthology, which still has not been published.

## The practical reality

There are few field studies of artistic work processes, concerning either theatre or TV. These are workplaces that, by tradition, have been inaccessible and kept secret. Their relationship to the outside eye is especially interesting. The dislike of examination was apparent at all the institutions where I have worked. The reasons are many: business-related or private, such as integrity, fear, and vanity. This is especially true of TV production. I was allowed to follow *Kall* only after I had signed a privacy contract that was so strictly formulated that Dramatiska Institutet and the film studies department did not dare to back my efforts.

The desire for power and control took different forms at and between the various institutions, and came to the fore in connection with the dissertation defence itself. Months in advance, I presented my request to film the conversation and an agreement was made. When the time came, there were suddenly strong attempts to stop the filming, up to the very last moment.

Finally the defence chair, Sven-Eric Liedman, who had not personally been informed of the ban on filming, felt obliged to make a number of phone calls to inform himself about the situation and to explain that the whole thing was to be recorded. Yet my film photographer – a student at Dramatiska Institutet – was prevented by a technician (!) from coming into the film theatre hall where the disputation was to take place, half an hour before the starting time. The filming finally happened. But clearly one has to wonder what can be so sensitive, and for whom, about documenting a conversation about the result of a dialogue between art and research.

The incident is typical of the administration that grew up around this

9. See Henrik Karlsson, “*En blå naivitet? – om konstnärlig och praktikbaserad forskning*,” in Lind and Wadensjö (Stockholm 2004), pp. 124–143. Cit. pp. 128–9.

activity. There was also the issue of not having access to the right technical equipment because my position as doctoral candidate was “unclear”, which would have far-reaching consequences for the aesthetic expression in my research results.

These and other examples might seem trivial in themselves, but taken together they contribute to making the everyday work of the doctoral candidate a struggle to carry out his or her work.

This is partly a case of “childhood illnesses”, but in retrospect it became clear that these are, most importantly, aspects of a cultural climate and of how the institutional relationships between art and science are organized in our society.

## A harmful dualism

On paper, the development of knowledge is an important issue for a school like Dramatiska Institutet. There exists, since 1978, a division for artistic development, and Per Lysander writes about that work:

*[T]he task is not limited to artistic and professional training, but also includes the task of producing new knowledge. The building of knowledge at Dramatiska Institutet takes place in forms that partly diverge from the research and science of the traditional university world. It is very much about reflection based on practice. Its forms are freer and directed toward offering teachers and professional artists a space for reflection and discussion. The presence of such a reflecting level is crucial for the school's ability to offer an education that reaches a professional level, and thereby possibilities for an individual artistic career for the students. [...] Consequently, the work of artistic development is at the school's storm center; it is there the ability to function as a transforming force is formed.<sup>10</sup>*

The two main positions in the jungle of viewpoints – those who mean that art can be science and needs to develop according to its own terms, and those who argue that science is subject to certain rules and that subjects who want to be considered academic must accommodate themselves to these – build on a common basis: a dualistic relationship between the traditions, and a belief that they are homogenous and incompatible by nature.

In fact, both art and science are heterogenous and fragmented. In spite of this, the dualistic perspective is the most prevalent attitude, regardless of which camp one belongs to, even if there are all kinds of variants. Traditional efforts, regardless of from which direction, are seldom met with protests. In this respect the representatives of, for example, the artistic schools in Stockholm are just as protectionist as the scientists from other fields.<sup>11</sup>

Personally, I believe in synergy effects and I am, like Henrik Karlsson, sceptical about separating practice and theory:

*Do we gain anything by drawing such boundaries, besides an intellectual satisfaction over having constructed some kind of order amidst a growing chaos?<sup>12</sup>*

For me, all artistic and scholarly processes and results are instead part of one

10. See Per Lysander, “Konstnärligt utvecklingsarbete på Dramatiska Institutet,” addendum to DI's KU publication series 2002-2008.

11. In a letter to the Culture Ministry from the deans of the six free artistic colleges in Stockholm, their position is clarified. Efva Lilja, choreographer and director of the Dance College, represents the group in an interview. Even though she does not want to exaggerate the opposite poles, she argues that art colleges get the short end of the stick in the encounter “since the artistic research does not use scholarly method and praxis.” She sees only one way, which also is a typical example of how art — and research — define themselves by using opposites: “But if art may not stand on the basis of its *own* research there can never be a true dialogue (my italics).” See Marcus Boldemann, “Viktigt att inte ställa konst mot vetenskap”, in Dagens Nyheter, June 11, 2006.

12. See Karlsson (2002). Cit. p. 113.

and the same great tradition of knowledge, one and the same conversation. The dialogue, taking an interest in the concrete questions in practice, is necessary. Drawing boundaries between one and the other in advance is the wrong approach to take.

For myself, I have kept in mind the research proposition that introduced the new field: "Through collaboration between art and science, new unconventional methods can be developed to gain new knowledge within all scholarly fields."<sup>14</sup> I have also made use of the interplay to strengthen my artistic work. That is in any case the storm center that I feel I have passed through, mostly alone (with the exception of my advisors), both at the film studies department and at Dramatiska Institutet.

## Risks

The aim of the research school was to examine the interface between art and research and to build further on existing knowledge within the participating colleges. In practice, collaboration between the institutions turned out to be difficult. The practical knowledge no doubt exists within the artistic field of work. However, the formation of artistic research requires a dialogue, which by nature involves more than one side. My experience shows that territorial struggles make that exchange almost impossible.

There is a lurking danger that it is the doctoral candidates who will get stuck when schools begin educational programs whose work they lack the competence for advising and evaluating. In my case, I was lucky with my advisors, once I had contacted and engaged Liedman as a new scholarly advisor, but to complete both a dissertation and a film entails two challenges, and how are you supposed to have time to create two qualified results of two separate kinds in the same time period usually devoted to only one? In England there is already a term for what the lack of clarity and the conflicts in task, role, and position can create – "the double Ph.D syndrome."<sup>15</sup>

Vague concepts and border police eventually affect both students and the surrounding society. If the field is to be developed it is essential that those who work at the institutions instead learn from the resistance that a true ambition can meet in this field. Otherwise there is a risk that the candidate is bounced between institutions that cannot leave the familiar routines. The process then gets stuck in a crossfire between territories and conflicting expectations. Even if the questions are hard – and interpreted as "impossible" from one or the other knowledge perspective – the fear of what can be lost in a new examination should not prevent the conversations from taking place.

## Possibilities

There are those within the field who talk about "the new" and then there are those who try to do something new. Inter esse borrows experiences from both art and traditional research. I have chosen to feel my way between the traditions by placing the field of tension within myself and both observe and create. The double role, which was natural for me, was not natural for the institutions.

The new forms of knowledge entail basic research, but there is a gap between the rhetoric and the concrete results within the new field. The research school Aesthetic Learning Processes was a construct, even by name. What is not an aesthetic learning process? If the Research Council is serious about its

14. See *Forskning och förnyelse*, 2000/2001:3 (Stockholm 2000), p. 69.

15. Literary scholar Victor Sage at the University of East Anglia in Norwich in a letter to Henrik Karlsson. See Karlsson (2002), p. 64.



venture of art and research, the actual achievements must be followed up and thoroughly evaluated. Only then can the experiences be reconnected.

The existing institutions have demonstrated an inability to see and understand the practitioners. It is rather select individuals, still few in number, who have the ability. My experience from working with Inter esse tells me that a navigable path – to remain mentally mobile between one or the other discipline – would be via an organisation outside of the existing institutional order. If the field is to be developed, structures that provide a platform for new competencies should be encouraged and supported. With a mutual interest comes the possibility for openness and dialogue.

The encounter between art and research is a question of knowledge in its widest sense. Whatever we do, we relate to tradition, but simply protecting the old can not be an end in itself. It is not a question of what we have, but in the description of what we have.

The pressure of our times pushes us to research and develop new meeting places, also between the old ones. A new form is more than the sum of its parts. This means that one must go outside of what one has learned. The encounter between two creates a third. With concrete results, new patterns are created beyond habitual conceptions.

The fear of change will hopefully disappear once the development of knowledge has taken root. Dramatiska Institutet today is a market-oriented school and the dramatic forms, not only at the address Valhallavägen 189, have much to gain from the productive power that only a deep-rooted ambition can provide. Artistic research could in this case contribute to broadening of the school's identity – for those who are interested.

*Translated by Sonia Wichmann*

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## A Commentary to Per Zetterfalk

Per Lysander, Director of the University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre - Dramatiska Institutet.

Per Zetterfalk arrived at Dramatiska Institutet during a time that was characterized by intensive, though perhaps chaotic, discussions about the possible forms of knowledge development within college-level artistic education. He has listened to it attentively and reused it in a hailstorm of quotations, including statements by me. When I read them it feels a little as if what I had written has been fed through a paper shredder and come out as strips that have then been taped together, resulting in the most unexpected revelations.

Per Zetterfalk has had the ambition to cross boundaries and challenge different fields that have been held together by traditions and strong self-images. He has then come to experience exactly this. Obviously it cannot have come as a surprise since it seems to have been the premise of his investigation – yet this is formulated as a shocking new insight.

The fact that a process has involved hardships and friction should not be

regretted once it has led to a successful result; every filmmaker or theatre artist knows that. Zetterfalk is convinced that the effort he has been forced to make in his dissertation work illuminates fundamental problems within both art and research. Accordingly, his well-formulated reflections sometimes risk slipping on the banana peel of banality.

Yes, Dramatiska Institutet can very well be described as a closed milieu trapped in an all too fixed self-image. I think that very few colleagues or students would claim that such a statement is groundless. What Zetterfalk has not seen, however, is that this milieu was involved in a debate about knowledge politics, particularly with representatives for artistic higher education at the universities of Gothenburg and Lund. The latter wished to make room also for artistically-based development of knowledge within the framework of traditional scholarly training and doctoral programs. I, along with colleagues at Dramatiska Institutet, advocated freer forms without formal exams.

It is easy to understand that a student who was present within a scientific research school could experience a certain provocation in finding himself in a milieu that jokingly referred to itself as a “doctor-free zone”. Yet it was a discussion that led forward along winding paths. Today many of the oppositions that Zetterfalk sees have been reformulated. The playing rules have shifted markedly. A special artistic doctoral degree is being announced by the government. A national research institute for the artistic fields is being established. Dramatiska Institutet could quite easily be seen as a losing party in this development. However, I do not believe that the formulation of an alternative position, as we attempted it, was a wasted effort for anyone.

But now that I encounter my own formulations in all of Per Zetterfalk’s short quotations, I cannot avoid a certain embarrassment about how the discussion seduced me into expressing myself with such rhetorical certainty. I must thank Per Zetterfalk for this. He has, among other things, been able to demonstrate the linguistic and intellectual limitations that can be stimulated by the position of college director.

*Translated by Sonia Wichmann*